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One of a series of papers prepared by members of the American Institute of Architects Committee on School and College Architecture and by selected specialists to make laymen aware of school building problems and trends and to stimulate discussion. The article sees the educational park concept as deriving from, in its simplest form, the consolidated school concept and especially the rural consolidated school. The patterns of planning which have emerged as well as the reasons educators have advanced for considering the educational park concept are cataloged and briefly discussed. The main concerns of those who are in dissent are stated. After summarizing the hopes for the kind of educational program and intellectual environment the concept will afford, the article cites the four basic needs a functionally planned facility must meet i.e. sufficient space, efficient relationships between spaces, preservation of the individual identity of the student through subschools, and space for outside persons who come to the school to assist with various parts of the curriculum. (FPO)

AIA SCHOOL PLANT STUDY BT 1-62

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High Honors for the Educational Park.

BY A. J. FERENDINO, FAIA

The old things in the world are getting new names, and a considerable amount of the change taking place today is more in the noises made by people describing the change than in the actual state of the universe. This is not to say there is no change—change is truly the key word of our era—but we must also note that modern man in all fields responds positively to new terminology.

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In education it is the "educational park," a new name which belongs in the society and civilization which created the megalopolis, the cartel and the computerized bits and nanoseconds.

In its simplest form, the educational park appears to have evolved from the consolidated school concept, separated by one generation and given an urban setting. This is an oversimplification, of course, but it is not an unfair frame of reference, for the major characteristic of the park is inevitably the amassing of large groups of students on a single site, and some forms of park development are indeed indistinguishable in purpose and intent from the rural consolidated school.

The fact that the educational park concept is so new, at this writing, allows us some poetic license with the definition, since so many have been advertised and so few have been even partially constructed. Certain generalizations can be made, however, and certain patterns are emerging:

1. The horizontal plan—This forms a single school from many of the same level such as all elementary schools.

2. The vertical plan—This pattern is formed by a single elementary school, a single junior high, or middle, school and a single high school. Each level moving up would need pupils from a correspondingly larger geographical area.

3. The pyramid plan—Here the conventional range of one high school, several junior high schools and many elementary schools are drawn from a constant geographical area and consolidated on one site.

4. Other plans—Many include some aspects of junior college, college, kindergarten, community school programs (Flint, Michigan, and Miami, for example), vocational and adult programs, health and welfare services, foreign student exchange programs, etc.

The problems which brought educators to the point of seriously considering the park concept vary from one locale to the next; however, among the published reports from educational park planning areas such as Pittsburgh; New York City; Syracuse; East Orange, New Jersey; Desire Parish, Louisiana; Fort Lauderdale and Miami Beach, Florida, there appear several consistently acknowledged reasons for this consideration:

1. Integration—The educational park system offers the best approach to this problem in areas of high-density, single-race composition—the most frequently quoted reason for its consideration.

2. Better programs—The system can afford these by the additional access to talented staff by more children, by the ability to stockpile materials, by the ability to offer special courses because of the large population and by the propinquity of space which eliminates traditional barriers to articulation between elementary and middle school, middle school and secondary or senior high school.

3. Mass purchasing, centralized delivery, centralized storage—More savings can evolve from these, and the need for low-yield space such as auditoriums and other potentially multiuse areas is also reduced.

4. Shifting of school population centers—This often leaves underpopulated schools in one area and overcrowded schools in others. A rise in average age of residents (as in Miami Beach) may deplete schools, while rapidly developing slum areas may saturate schools in central districts.

The park has been highly controversial as a theoretical concept and has raised many thoughtful discussions within and without the pro-

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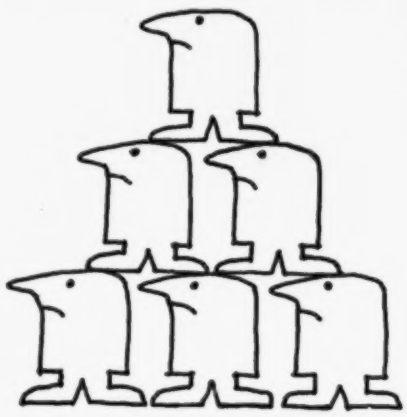
fession, just as progressive education, teaching machines and merit pay did in their day.

The main concern of those who dissent with proponents of the educational park is that it will destroy the neighborhood school. This is a legitimate claim, since the park will tend to do this in the areas it serves, removing the children beyond walking distance and from neighborhood playmates, and removing the school from the parent and the community activities which the former cherishes as a unifying, cohesive community force.

Those who favor the park feel that the larger geographic area served helps expand the myopic view of the child who has been limited to a few blocks, in a world which can be circumnavigated in a matter of hours and in a nation whose average citizen makes a major move every five years.



Amassing of large groups

A second fear is that school populations up to 10,000 or more will tend to smother and annihilate the individual. Visions of "Brave New World" seem to describe the school world of massive, impersonal space and massive, impersonal crowds. Again, the concern is legitimate and a distinct possibility. However, there is no reason why it need be. The organization of the mammoth can be made softer, more personal, smaller, even acceptable by the creation of schools-within-a-school or by special pods or units which limit the intermixing of crowds, so that most of the day for any student is spent within a group of 100-120, with adequate opportunity for small-group and individual study and guidance. Each such unit would have its administrative and staff integrity which would represent the unit in team administrative processes.

A third concern is that the transportation of children over long distances would produce much cumulative lost and wasted time. Again the claim may be justified. The best answer, that of equipping busses with programmed tapes and films, has not been proven in practice yet.

Other objections exist which, though less emotional, are still basic: Customary problems are greatly magnified by the increased size and complexity of the school. The educational park requires a large site which rarely will be found at reasonable prices in the geographical area desired. Assembling large numbers of people in one location requires sophisticated transportation systems, complicated by the very nature of school population. Present inequities of taxes and insufficient revenue sources must be solved before meaningful progress can take place.

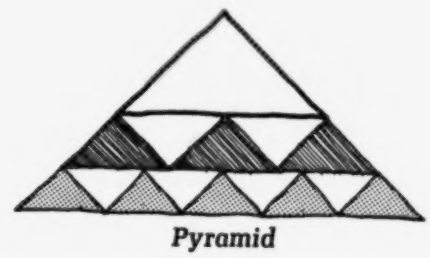
Various major conferences this year have dealt seriously with the subject of educational parks. The consensus has been that educational parks in the planning stage will become realities and that many more will be planned and constructed in the near future. What follows here summarizes the hopes of those who agree upon the inevitability of the educational park.

A first objective of a general park would be to produce a complete and continuous program vertically, without sharp breaks in the student's learning experience as he progresses through the system. This implies not only an upgraded system but total freedom and interaction with students at the same level of achievement, as well as interaction in family and community relations. It assumes that school, family and living are all one harmonious experience, undivided by distinction of grades, schoolhouse and summer vacations.

A tall order: It places emphasis on meeting the needs of the student

Horizontal

Vertical



Pyramid

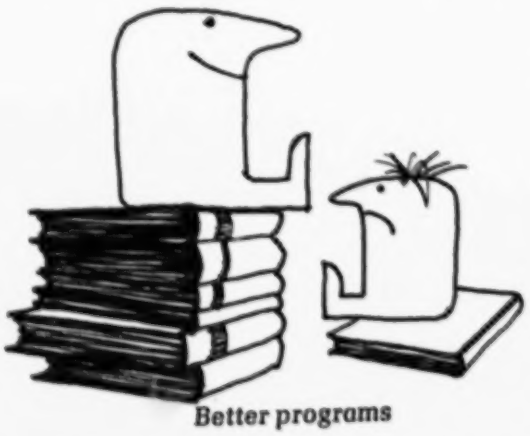
where they should be met and points out the tremendous importance of instructors who understand what these needs are. As an aid in achieving this understanding, the entire staff and faculty can plan and work together by having at hand all records and information available on the individual student.

The normal break which occurs as the pupil is passed from one administration to another can be avoided. Admittedly, in our mobile population, there will still occur many breaks as families move from one place to another. The computer can be of great aid in orderly transmission of such information and is bound to play a large part in school complexes such as we are envisioning.

However, this is not meant to imply that we can ignore human

scale. If life and learning experiences are to have any meaning, and even if life in mass population is to have any sanity, human scale and levels of "territorality" must exist in all structures, be they educational parks, homes or offices. Research is at hand to substantiate this. Thus, to avoid pitfalls of future inhuman, impersonal, massive structures, the best innovative and creative administrative and architectural talent available will be required.

Educationally and psychologically, the large numbers of students will afford greater opportunities for more groupings according to the individual child's level of achievement. There are likely to be fewer bright children bored by a pace maintained for the average. Facilities and opportunities for higher-quality education must eventually be offered by the educational park. Qualified personnel to staff and teach must be trained and recruited.



Better programs

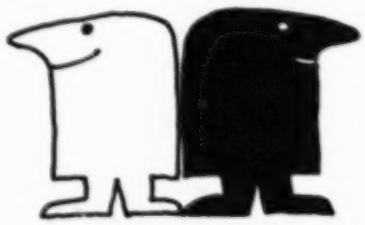
New concepts of education should breed new architectural concepts. Such a new building complex must be many things: It must be a happy welcoming place to small children as well as a place to stimulate and assure senior citizens who will be going back to school. Many of the students will come from dreary home environments in slums. Until the slums are erased, the school building must help offset their deadening impact.

It must be a place where the brilliant scholar, as well as the slowest learner, can find equal challenge to his respective abilities. It must provide efficient utilitarian facilities for technological training; it must become truly a *community* school to which may come people from all walks of life in need of further education.

Lastly, the school must be an educational landmark which commands community respect and instills community pride. This, with more, might be the charge of the educational park: to provide the new schoolhouse for tomorrow.

Once the educational program has been developed, the facility must be functionally planned to meet four basic needs:

1. Sufficient space, square footage as well as volume must be provided to house the necessary equipment and staff to offer a full range of courses. Thought also must be given to the future, whether to expand the original facility or to build new ones as need for growth comes about.



Integration

2. Planning and program must be studied sufficiently to provide efficient physical relationships between the spaces and equipment of related courses.

3. Provision must be made to maintain the individual student's sense of identity and importance within the facility and the student body. This could be done by dividing the park into many subschools, each with an identity but all under a central administration.

4. Space must be provided for outside persons, such as social workers, sociologists, psychologists, etc., to come into the school and work in collaboration with students and teachers on various parts of the curriculum. To facilitate this, the educational park should be located within easy reach of other community facilities.

Dollar savings

Physical facilities must be planned not only for known past needs of educational buildings but also with an understanding of the new functional possibilities of the educational park. The current trend of providing education for people of all ages will require study as to the range and extent of programs needed.

Today in an urban society under increasing government influence, there is a growing tendency to make available to the community more social services of many kinds. In the past as well as at present, facilities housing these services have been so fragmented and unrelated in both organization and geographical location as to be practically useless to those they were meant to serve. Thus the educational park must offer opportunities to centralize and expedite these services.

Throughout history people have gathered for living and working around some central focus. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution this focus has been the vast industrial complexes which have done so much to bring about the metropolis of today. Yet even today we see already the beginning of a new focal point: universities and research centers. In the emerging megapolis of tomorrow, the educational park must become a "knowledge factory" which will be the focus of a new civilization.

New architectural concepts

In this developing trend, the educational park stands ready to break down the fortress school of today and become a "shopping center" of living which, in addition to educational facilities, contains art galleries, theaters, auditoriums, libraries and other centers of cultural learning activity. Now we are talking about school and community being one. Universities already do this to a degree, and centers in the planning stage increase the trend.

We can hope that this is a fair appraisal of the educational park and its potential. Whether its primary purpose is that of counteracting the ghetto or of providing more sophisticated (and expensive) educational facilities and equipment, the educational park can be made to serve the total community effectively. Loss of the corner schoolhouse, many communities feel, is not too high a price to pay. □